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General Assembly

Twenty-fourth special session

Official Records

9th meeting
Friday, 30 June 2000, 10 a.m.
Geneva

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Khorram (Islamic Republic of Iran), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 3 (*continued*)

Credentials of representatives to the special session of the General Assembly

(b) Report of the Credentials Committee (A/S-24/7)

The Acting President: The General Assembly will now take action on the draft resolution recommended by the Credentials Committee in paragraph 15 of its report. The Credentials Committee adopted the draft resolution without a vote. May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution S-24/1).

The Acting President: The Assembly has thus concluded its consideration of agenda item 3 (b).

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

Proposals for further initiatives for social development

(a) Review and appraisal of progress since the World Summit for Social Development

(b) Proposals for further initiatives for the full implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development

The Acting President: I first give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Bedredin Ibraimi, Deputy Prime Minister of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Mr. Ibraimi (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) (*spoke in Macedonian; English text furnished by the delegation*): At the outset, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, I would like to congratulate Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab on his election as President of the General Assembly at its special session on the implementation of decision adopted at the World Summit on Social Development. We thank him for his efforts in successfully organizing the session and express the hope that our work will be successful and fruitful. I would also like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his commitment to the special session and to the results that it is expected to produce. Furthermore, allow me to thank Switzerland for its hospitality and its efforts, along with the citizens of Geneva. Our thanks go also to all others who made a contribution to the organization of this important session.

The start of the new millennium is the right moment to review what has been achieved thus far and to promote our future commitments in the field of

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social development. The several sessions held by the Preparatory Committee and by the Commission for Social Development demonstrated that little progress has been made in implementing the commitments undertaken at the World Summit on Social Development. Seen from the perspective of the twenty-first century, it can be concluded that the twentieth century was the one in which humanity reached the highest level of technological development, but it was also one in which we faced the greatest sufferings and humiliation, a century in which poverty was not eradicated, a century without full employment, social integration and social services for all.

The basic goals of every society are to decrease and eradicate poverty and to improve the standard of living of its people. It is necessary to undertake appropriate measures and policies to reach these goals. The United Nations has an important role to play in designing international relations in this sphere, especially in terms of the globalization of the world economy and of narrowing the differences between rich and poor countries. Countries in transition, as well as developing, small and underdeveloped countries, rightfully expect that this special session will be an occasion when problems we are facing can be identified and when concrete action for the full and effective implementation of what was agreed upon in Copenhagen can be undertaken.

In the period since the 1995 World Summit, the Republic of Macedonia has been consistently pursuing a policy of stabilizing economic trends and of structural reform. The process of establishing a State governed by the rule of law within a parliamentary democracy is being continuously strengthened; the political system facilitates democratic processes; we enjoy civic tolerance, and human and civil rights and freedoms, which represent the basis upon which the Macedonian State has grown. The development of inter-ethnic relations and stability are the key to the peace and stability of the country and of the region, which form the basis for strengthening our international position.

Like other countries in transition, the Republic of Macedonia has during this period been addressing the issue of a large impoverished population and all the implications of poverty. That situation was created by several years of decline in economic activities, the insolvency of economic actors, current deficits of social funds, the implementation of privatization and structural reforms, and the implementation of a stabilization policy. In order to permit accelerated economic development, a precondition for social development, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, in May this year, adopted its 2003 programme for economic development and reform in Macedonia.

Last year, the crisis in the region and the events in neighbouring Yugoslavia had an impact in the Republic of Macedonia as well. The social price that our State paid was increased unemployment and a large number of laid-off workers, a huge number of refugees who were accommodated on our territory, and an increase in the number of families that were the beneficiaries of social assistance. However, with enhanced involvement by the Government and other entities, as well as through additional macro-economic policy measures and with the support of the international community, a larger decline in production was prevented. With the end of military activities in the region beginning in June 1999, a trend of growth in industrial production commenced. As one of the countries most affected by the Kosovo crisis, the Republic of Macedonia concluded a new arrangement with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In this regard, the Government decided to prepare two strategic documents: a provisional report on decreasing poverty, and a strategy for decreasing poverty.

Unemployment, among the greatest world problems, is present in the Republic of Macedonia as well. In addition to standing at a high rate, unemployment in our country also affects large numbers of young people. The Government is making efforts to increase employment. Starting in 1995, with financial assistance from the World Bank, we began implementing our project on social reforms and technical assistance, and its sub-project, the programme for re-employment. The project is being successfully implemented and its various benefits have been confirmed by representatives of the World Bank. By the end of this year we will adopt a national strategy, that is to say an agreement on employment among the Government, trade unions, chambers of commerce and other actors, to stimulate and promote forms of employment.

Regretfully, I have to stress that over the past two years, at the international level, we have seen flagrant violation of and disrespect for the fundamental values

of democratic society. In addition to the natural disasters that the world has faced, we are witnessing a growing trend towards war, conflict and internal and external tensions. From the perspective of the Republic of Macedonia, I wish to elaborate upon the huge crisis that occurred in the region of South-Eastern Europe, the consequences of which endangered stability and security in the Balkans and beyond in Europe.

The Kosovo crisis especially affected the Republic of Macedonia. We managed to deal with a huge number of refugees — 360,000, or 18 per cent of the total population. This was an economic, social and political situation that could have led to the destabilization of the country, especially if one takes into consideration the insufficiently prompt reaction of the international community. The damages that the Macedonian economy suffered, and still suffers, are huge. All of this resulted in the deterioration of an already difficult economic and social situation.

However, the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia demonstrated a high level of humanity towards the refugees. They also displayed tolerance, solidarity and moderation under the enormous social, political and economic pressures which had been created and which could have resulted in undesired consequences.

The Republic of Macedonia managed to overcome these difficulties, but their consequences can still be felt in the national economy. The elimination of these consequences requires indispensable financial assistance and support by the international community. Compensation for damages wrought on the Macedonian economy should be an obligation of the international community. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to call upon the international community to continue its efforts and consistently fulfil the commitments it has undertaken. Our presence here confirms our common commitment to strengthening cooperation in the interest of peace, stability and security, as well as of social and economic development.

Political stability as a precondition for economic development is of great relevance and importance, since without political stability we cannot imagine or achieve economic prosperity and development in our States, regions or worldwide.

I would like to underline the importance of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe for the Republic of Macedonia. We consider that it offers great possibilities for the region to finally live in peace, stability and prosperity and to be more promptly integrated into the European family.

In the 1999-2000 period, progress has been evident in relations between the Republic of Macedonia and the European Union. The process of association of Macedonia with the European Union commenced with the ultimate goal being integrated into the Union. It is noteworthy that the Republic of Macedonia was the first country in the region to start negotiations on the conclusion of a stabilization and association agreement. We are working intensively, and it is expected that negotiations will be completed by the end of this year.

The Republic of Macedonia is decisively committed to accelerating its integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Great progress has been made, and our activities and reform orientation contained in the Annual National Programme for Membership of the Republic of Macedonia in NATO have been supported.

From all that I have stated here, it can be concluded that the Republic of Macedonia actively participates in present modern global trends, and I would like to underline our commitments to a consistent respect for and implementation of the obligations undertaken at the World Summit for Social Development and at this special session.

The Acting President: I would now like to invite Her Excellency Mrs. Tembé Ashira Assih-Aissah, Minister for Social Affairs of Togo to take the floor.

Mrs. Assih-Aissah (Togo) (*spoke in French*): First and foremost, allow me to convey the warm greetings of the President of the Togolese Republic, General Gnassingbé Eyadema, and of the Togolese Government and people.

Our session's theme, "World Summit for Social Development and beyond: achieving social development for all in a globalizing world", deserves the interest of all of the countries in the world, especially those of Africa, whose evolution towards a better, more just and more equitable world is regularly disrupted by constant socio-political crises, wars and natural disasters. Togo thus welcomes the holding of this session and assures you, Mr. President, that it will

support any initiative that may serve to ensure the socio-economic betterment of humankind.

The economic difficulties of the 1980s confronted my country with a major challenge, that of building a just, equitable and progressive society. That meant re-thinking social development policies and ensuring that they had a real impact on the living conditions of people in the context of meagre financial resources. It is in line with these ideas that, like other countries, Togo welcomed the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen with the hope of having a process launched that would provide relevant responses to the social problems that have now been identified.

We must recognize that the pre-Copenhagen situation was not at all encouraging. The main socio-economic indicators, which had been constantly improving towards the end of the 1980s, underwent a decline following the socio-economic and political crisis which started in the year 1990. The choices and objectives that were decided upon in 1995 have allowed the Togolese Government to introduce economic reforms and to take measures that would help to place the macro-economic situation on a more healthy footing and promote sustained growth. The liberalization and restructuring of the economy have strengthened the role of civil society, particularly that of non-governmental organizations, groups and production associations, in designing and implementing development projects. Thus in the economic sector, the average annual growth rate in our country was 4.4 per cent between 1995 and 1999.

In the fight against poverty, studies have been drawn up that have made possible a real assessment of the causes of poverty and provided reliable data for the implementation of a certain number of programmes and projects. The micro-projects programme has provided considerable assistance to agricultural and tradespersons' groups and has promoted the establishment and introduction of social and community infrastructures. The extension of micro-finance to help women in certain areas has given a new dynamism to income-generating activities. The implementation of an urban development programme, giving rise to work with high labour intensity, has promoted the creation of jobs for young people. Specific projects have made it possible to improve basic services such as schools, health services, water supply and hygiene, while giving priority to the fight against AIDS, which has been the object of a systematic information and awareness campaign.

In summary, thanks to these actions, the main social indicators are gradually improving in the health and education sectors. Many other activities have also been carried out to promote women and the private sector. Concerning social integration, multi-sectoral projects, implemented with development partners, are also helping to achieve this goal.

We must recognize, however, that the constant economic adjustments and austerity measures are further marginalizing the most vulnerable and most disadvantaged segments of the population, and their ranks are constantly swelling. Despite these difficulties, those segments of the population are benefiting from many specific actions that are targeted towards promoting activities in the fields of consciousness-raising, information, education, communication, prevention and social integration.

When we turn to the subject of employment, with the combined effect of structural adjustment programmes, the socio-political crisis which our country has undergone and the incapacity of our economy to generate productive jobs on a sufficient scale, we see that the unemployment rate has worsened and is estimated to represent more than 30 per cent of the active population. Aware of the major challenge it has to face, the Government has taken an array of measures aimed at gradually curbing unemployment among young people.

The socio-political disruptions that our country experienced in its move towards democracy in the 1990s did not make it possible to create the best conditions to reverse the trend towards a decline in the living conditions of our people and the marginalization of the disadvantaged social sectors.

To end this situation, political initiatives taken with the support of the international community have made possible the signature of the Lomé framework agreement between the opposition and the presidential majority. This agreement has marked the way for the peaceful anchoring of democracy in our country. To that end, a joint monitoring committee for this Agreement has started work and an Independent National Electoral Commission has been established. Thus, efforts have been made to strengthen the rule of law.

The implementation of the Copenhagen recommendations requires considerable financial resources. This can be possible only if the commitments of solidarity and partnership between rich and poor countries are strengthened.

In that regard, measures such as the cancellation of the debt of the least developed countries, the opening up of industrialized countries' markets to products from developing countries, the introduction of more just and equitable multilateral trade rules and a reversal of the trend of reduced official development assistance should be seriously considered.

Social development for all in a globalizing world can become a reality only if there is real awareness of responsibility at all levels. Present and future generations will be eternally grateful to us for seeing to that.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Mrs. Suad El-Fatih, Adviser to the President on Women and Children's Affairs of the Sudan.

Mrs. El-Fatih (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank Mr. Kofi Annan for his growing interest in third world countries and the Swiss Government for hosting this Summit in this beautiful country.

Five years have elapsed since the World Summit for Social Development adopted the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, which placed the human being at the centre of development. The leaders of our countries committed themselves to providing the much-needed political support for the eradication of poverty, the promotion of full and productive employment, the reduction of unemployment and the fostering of social integration through the implementation of the 10 Copenhagen commitments.

Those five years have failed to bring about what we had expected in terms of fulfilling the commitments and the implementation of the recommendations contained in the two Copenhagen documents. Social conditions in developing countries, particularly in Africa, continue to be stagnant, if not deteriorating, and the gap between rich and poor countries has widened. The degree of poverty has escalated in the least developed countries. A sharp decline in employment opportunities is clearly manifested and has led to the crippling of the process of social integration. This has had a negative impact on structural adjustment programmes. The unprecedented heavy burden of external debt and debt-servicing represents a major obstacle to the attainment of development in the indebted countries. It has become evident that the process of globalization, which is based on liberalization of trade, is exacerbating the already precarious economic situation in developing countries, particularly in Africa.

If appropriate preventive measures are not taken, the negative impact of globalization will result in the further deterioration of conditions in developing countries. It will also lead to an increase in poverty levels and to considerable job losses, thus negatively affecting social development. The globalization and monopolization of information will lead to the marginalization of cultures and the disintegration of the identity of many communities.

Although we recognize that social development is a national responsibility, it cannot be successfully and optimally achieved without the collective commitments and efforts of the international community. In this connection, we believe in the necessity of fulfilling the yet-to-be-attained internationally agreed target of 0.7 per cent of the gross national product of developed countries for official development assistance as soon as possible.

We reiterate the importance of finding an effective, equitable, development-oriented solution to the external debt and debt-servicing burdens of developing countries, which curtail their social development. The Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative must be financed and implemented. The restructuring of the international economic system is imperative in order to bring about transparency and stability in the international monetary system and to make the Bretton Woods institutions more democratic and responsive to the challenges of development, within the framework of international monetary integration.

We emphasize the importance of enhancing the capacities of developing countries to overcome obstacles to development within the framework of economic globalization by augmenting the trend of industrialization, strengthening national infrastructures, transfer of technology and access to knowledge and information through international assistance. Another important aspect is increasing and improving access for

products of developing countries to international markets through the reduction of tariff barriers and other protectionist measures.

We call upon our development partners to show more political resolve and genuine willingness to help developing countries improve their competitiveness in international markets. This can be attained only through generous financial assistance from the industrialized world directed towards improving and enhancing weak infrastructures and augmenting national institutional capacities.

It is imperative to put an end to the practice of imposing economic sanctions and unilateral economic coercive measures, in contravention of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, if we are to create an international environment conducive to social development for all. We should ensure the right to development as an indivisible component of internationally recognized human rights and the right to food and medical care for all. I reiterate, it is imperative to end economic sanctions and unilateral economically coercive measures, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

The international community should make greater efforts to combat endemic diseases, especially malaria, which is considered the greatest threat to life in a considerable number of developing countries, particularly in Africa. African heads of State recently held a special summit to address this scourge.

Notwithstanding the unfavourable international atmosphere, my country, as I stated earlier, has registered remarkable progress in the area of social development. I will briefly highlight some of the achievements of the past five years.

First, in the field of economic development, the Sudan has had a free market economy during that period. The rate of growth of the country's gross domestic product averaged 5.6 per cent during the period 1995-1999, while the inflation rate was reduced to 16 per cent by the year 1999, as compared to 69.1 per cent in 1995. That rate continued to decrease during the first half of 2000. Due to liberal economic policies, the Sudan was able to attract flows of foreign direct investment in the areas of oil, mining, energy, agriculture and livestock.

Secondly, in the area of popular political participation, in order to achieve balanced development, the Sudan has adopted an advanced federal system of government. This decentralized form of government has increased administration at the local level and proved to be the ideal way to ensure political participation from the grass-roots to the uppermost levels. To ensure the bridging of developmental gaps and disparities between states, the federal Government has allocated financial resources to the States Development Fund to support development activities in the least developed States.

Thirdly, in order to expedite the eradication of poverty, the Government has formulated an effective strategy and has sought to implement it by incorporating the poor and disadvantaged in the cycle of production. Two and a half million poor families have been provided with suitable means for working productively by the year 2002; the social security umbrella has been extended to cover a wider range of sectors; and specialized social funds have been established to protect financially vulnerable groups from the negative effects of the structural adjustment programmes, by the time the national comprehensive strategy is carried to completion, in the year 2002. The Sudanese Savings Bank for Social Development was established to help the poor and to help provide production tools to small-scale producers and to the disadvantaged. The *zakat* and *wafq*-endowment resources are also being directed towards the poor.

Fourthly, in order to foster productive employment and widen its scope, the Sudan articulated and implemented a national economic-recovery strategy from 1989 to 1993, with a view to achieving comprehensive sustainable development. This strategy aimed at producing a skilled labour force in order to enhance productivity, empowering women through their active involvement in the national economy and reducing unemployment rates by the end of the national comprehensive strategy in the year 2002. The expansion of work opportunities in the countryside was also targeted, with a view to improving living standards there and to reducing migration from the countryside to urban centres. Preferential privileges were granted to labour-intensive projects, with the objective of creating labour opportunities for 1 million people and of eradicating child labour during the last three-year programme of the national comprehensive strategy.

Fifthly, the ongoing effort to empower women and promote the welfare of children reached its climax after it was made a direct responsibility of the

presidency. The President of the Republic has appointed a woman to be his adviser on women's and children's affairs. This advisory body is now engaged in formulating a new strategy, defining programmes for enabling women and protecting the welfare of families and children, and articulating ways and means for the effective implementation of this strategy.

The establishment of this unique advisory body has increased the value, vitality and efficiency of the Government's work with women and for child welfare. The strategies of the advisory body regarding women and children are manifested in recent presidential decrees. One of the important decisions of this body has been to establish a children's parliament in order to promote the values of dialogue, personal opinions, rights, duties and democracy in the minds of our children. With respect to women and motherhood, and upon the recommendation of the advisory body the President of the Republic has decreed that all women charged with minor crimes be released and be rehabilitated so that they can lead decent and honourable lives. The decree went further: it prohibited the imprisonment of pregnant women until after they have given birth and had two years to care for the offspring.

The advisory body has recommended that, besides the already approved pregnancy leave, women be given maternal leave for two years, with full pay during the first six months. Financial subsidies will be given to women during the remaining 18 months of the leave. These subsidies will come from the maternal and childhood fund, which gets its resources from the *zakat*, its endowment, voluntary contributions and investment revenues.

Women in the Sudan have made remarkable progress due to their continued struggle and wisdom. Women are active partners in all walks of life in the community. They now occupy high-ranking positions. There have been women members of Parliament since 1965, as well as women advisers to the President, women ministers, under-secretaries and executive directors in the private and public sectors, and high-ranking women officers in the army and the police forces. There are more than five hundred woman judges, four of them in our Supreme Court. The number of women in university and post-graduate institutions is far greater than the number of men. Women make up on average 62 per cent of matriculating students. The Constitution and laws of the Sudan do not discriminate between men and women. In the midst of all this progress, there are no conflicts between men and women in our society, and our families are intact and provide good care for our children and promote community cohesion.

Sixthly, as a result of the progress I have mentioned, the employment rate has risen by 33 per cent during the last decade. The percentage of women in the labour market has exceeded that of men both in towns and in the countryside. The use of child labour has been reduced, thanks to the expansion of pre-school education through the establishment of kindergartens in urban and rural areas.

It is evident that the ability of Sudanese society to promote social integration and mutual support has greatly increased. Sudanese society has proved its ability to deal positively with its cultural, religious, geographic and ethnic diversities.

These abilities were enhanced by being enshrined in the 1998 national Constitution of the Sudan, which stipulated the adoption of a democratic, multiparty system and the respect of internationally recognized human rights and freedoms. It also established equality before the law and the fact that citizenship is the basis of constitutional rights and duties. The Constitution also guarantees all groups the inherent right to preserve their culture, language and religion and to raise their children as they wish.

Our common goal of placing social development high on the agenda of the international community should inspire us to serious collective reflection and to devise appropriate means to safeguard our noble humanistic objectives against the vagaries of politics. We should not give our narrow national interests precedence over the overall progress of humanity, as we should pave the way for safety and stability for all. We must strive to ensure that prosperity is enjoyed by all humankind.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Mrs. Sumedha Jayasena, Minister for Social Services of Sri Lanka.

Mrs. Jayasena (Sri Lanka) (*spoke in Sinhalese; English text furnished by the delegation*): Mr. President, let me at the outset extend to you the congratulations of the people and the Government of Sri Lanka. It is also my privilege to continue with the good work done by the previous Ministers for Social

Services in the Government of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, President of Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka lost no time in implementing the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development. Our Government advocates a policy of development with a human face, hence social development is a top priority for us. The World Summit was timely in that it sought a new social development paradigm within and between countries. What is now required is for us to work to implement and follow up the Programme of Action.

A mid-term review of the outcome of the World Summit was held at Manila in 1997 for the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) region. Now, at the end of the fifth year, we are gathered here for the global review. Sri Lanka takes modest pride in our achievements with respect to the pledges made at the World Summit, despite constraints brought about by terrorist violence and lack of resources. Nevertheless, much remains to be done in the short to medium term.

Sri Lanka has been noted since the early 1950s as a social development model because of its strong emphasis on improving the quality of life of the people and because of its complex social protection and integration programmes, at times at the expense of investment in economic growth. Our achievements in the area of health and education have been above the global average. By 1999, Sri Lanka had achieved an infant mortality rate of 15.9 per 1,000 births, a maternal mortality rate of 2.3 per 10,000 live births, and a life expectancy of 73.1 years, which is only 3 per cent below the average for the developed world. On the educational front, Sri Lanka has achieved a 90.7 per cent literacy rate.

Currently, the programmes and projects on social development are well focused and better targeted. The programmes range from pauper allowances; special protection programmes for the disabled, for vulnerable women, and for children and the elderly; and pensions and social security for the self-employed poor. These programmes provide the necessary socio-economic safety net to the vulnerable and marginalized groups during the transition to sustainable and equitable economic growth and development.

A number of legal enactments related to different aspects of social development, such as protection for workers, labour wage security and social welfare measures and schemes, have been promulgated since 1994.

A number of presidential task forces have also been set up. These task forces examine and recommend better ways of empowering, and protecting the rights of, women and children as well as the disabled and the elderly, and they also recommend ways of streamlining and increasing the relevance and coverage of basic elements of social development such as education and health care.

Further, national steering committees on various aspects of social development have been set up pursuant to the decisions of the World Summit. These mechanisms contribute to and facilitate policy-making on social development at the national level through the promotion of an active dialogue among State agencies, donor agencies, non-governmental organizations and the private sector on issues of social programme implementation, coverage and effectiveness.

These steering committees also deliberate and make decisions on other vital matters, such as the improved targeting of programmes, the empowerment of socio-economically marginalized groups and the need for a national data base with multi-user access. With the technical and financial support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and under the guidance of the National Committee on Social Development, a technical proposal for the establishment of a social development management information system has now been completed. This information system will become functional in about a month's time.

We have taken many targeted measures to ameliorate social conditions for important segments of our society. However, national efforts alone cannot address all social development challenges. Sri Lanka is committed to liberal market economic policies, with the aim of integrating into the world economy. Like many other developing countries in similar situations, we too have come to terms with the irreversible process of globalization — a process that offers both challenges and opportunities.

With capital, production and management moving across borders, the impact of globalization on our societies has become immense. This process also brings in its wake additional demands on our societies. The rule-based multilateral trading system that came into being with the creation of the World Trade

Organization was a response to the evolving process of globalization. However, the new multilateral trading system has not brought the promised benefits in terms of market access to developing countries, nor were the obligations that have been imposed on developing countries consistent with their level of economic development. There is great concern, therefore, that the new multilateral trading system is not balanced and that the benefits of the Uruguay Round were not fair and equitable. It is therefore increasingly felt that the framework rules in the international trade arena should take into account the development dimension and the impact such rules have on developing countries if we are to prevent small economies from being further marginalized in the global economy. In such a situation, even the best laid national social development plans can become unsustainable. Even more disturbing would be the erosion of past social development achievements.

What is required to provide better living and social standards for our people is greater market access with the imposition of fewer restraints and conditionalities. Social standards or issues should not constitute protectionism in disguise, intended to deny market access. Demands that new labour standards or environmental measures should be linked to trade are tantamount to a further denial of market access to developing countries. This would in turn have a negative impact on economic and social development, because developing countries would be deprived of the ability to take advantage of their own competitive and comparative advantages. We believe that greater market access and the resulting economic growth would be the most sustainable way to improve social standards for our peoples. Economic history amply demonstrates that truth.

As we redefine our development strategies, my Government is committed to following that sustainable course. As advocated by Her Excellency The Honourable Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, President of Sri Lanka, we will pursue a free market economy with a human face, and will provide safety nets for the vulnerable segments of society.

The Acting President: I call next on His Excellency Mr. Edgardo Mosqueira, Minister of the Presidency of the Republic of Peru.

Mr. Mosqueira (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am very pleased to be here, participating in this debate on key aspects of the implementation of the World Summit for Social Development. Peru has formulated a strategy for the implementation of the commitments that were laid down at Copenhagen in 1995, in particular commitments 2 and 8, comprising four tools for the promotion of national development, the reduction of poverty and laying the foundations for generating wealth. They are: to strengthen the economic stability of the country and ensure a suitable institutional framework for the efficient operation of the market economy; to consolidate the country's internal and external pacification by dismantling terrorist movements, sustaining the fight against drug-trafficking gangs and settling pending boundary problems; to build capacity in the neediest sectors by investing in the social and economic infrastructure; and to create opportunities for the development of communities and of citizens.

Extreme poverty dropped by more than 12 percentage points between 1991 and 1997: from 26.8 per cent to 14.7 per cent. As for total poverty, it fell by almost 7 percentage points in that same period. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) indicates that Peru is in eightieth place in the Human Development Index, a rise of six places compared with its 1998 ranking.

I would like to share some of the principles that have guided our strategy. Regarding commitment 1, the various social programmes that have been undertaken to build the capacities and opportunities of which I spoke share a variety of mechanisms for participation by citizens in the selection and prioritization of plans and projects, as well as in their implementation and financing. Citizens have thus become important elements of society's control of State action and of ownership of the programmes and projects by the beneficiary communities. This has fostered the establishment of trust between the State and civil society, an important element that had previously been neglected. It has made possible the accumulation of social capital in terms of organization, training and leadership of the communities.

Considerable investment has been made in capacity-building in the context of commitment 6 of the Copenhagen Declaration. As a result of the investment in health, the coverage of primary-care institutions doubled between 1995 and 1998, going from 6 million to 12.4 million users. School attendance by children between the ages of 6 and 11 rose from

87.3 per cent in 1993 to 95.6 in 1998: almost universal attendance. The coverage of the drinking-water network amounted to 67.7 per cent in 1998, compared with 57.4 per cent in 1993, while sewage network coverage rose from 40 per cent to 52 per cent within the same period. Through investment in the energy sector, we increased coverage at the national level from 52 per cent of the population in 1993 to 72 per cent in 1998.

Thanks to the participatory strategy of our social programmes, many communities are now capable of managing programmes and projects. This has made it possible, for example, to hand over to them the management of the health centres.

In the implementation of commitment 3 of the Declaration, the capacity-building process of which I have spoken has gone hand-in-hand with an effort to generate opportunities for the poorest members of the population. We are convinced that it is necessary for the State to support the special role of individuals as generators of their own incomes and of improved social and economic conditions. This line of action is based on defining visions of local development, identifying the competitive and comparative advantages of the various regions, and identifying the goods and services that communities can develop to become part of an integrated market.

Regarding commitments 4, 5 and 6, our Ministry for the Advancement of Woman and Human Development was created in 1996 with the specific mission of emphasizing the promotion of citizenship and the inclusion of vulnerable or disadvantaged groups. Our national literacy programme, which received the King Sejong Literacy Prize from the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) in 1999, our national plan for equal opportunities for men and women 2000-2005, and our Commission for Indigenous Affairs all operate within that ministry.

The indigenous population of the country was consulted in 1998 to find out their vision of the future through 2005 and to hear their proposals about what they themselves could do to realize that vision and what they think that the State should do. In a similar vein, the Government, the corporate sector, non-governmental organizations, grass-roots communities and donors have undertaken a process of dialogue on experiences and challenges in the struggle against poverty.

On commitments 9 and 10, I should like to point out that in accordance with the provisions of the 20/20 initiative, we have increased the resources allocated for basic social expenditures, which now stand at around $80 per person, compared with $12 in 1990. Peru has thus been complying by allocating far more than 20 per cent of its budget to meet the population's basic needs.

Our task for the near future is to place the accent on identifying and developing opportunities that will allow the poorest Peruvians to become part of the market economy and to be control their own future: a future based on economic stability, social peace and development opportunities.

Finally, as pointed out by President Alberto Fujimori, the way in which globalization is affecting countries with undeveloped economies reflects the extent to which that process is essentially not uniformly global, but is rather taking place within a system of imbalances and discord that we should have left behind. The success of poverty-eradication programmes depends on the creation of a fairer world order, the establishment of a truly free global economy with access to developed-country markets, and the adoption of international regulations that will permit a sound relationship among financial markets.

The Acting President: I wish to remind delegations of the time limit of seven minutes for statements, which was established with a view to completing our work in a timely manner.

I call next on His Excellency Mr. Eiki Nestor, Minister for Social Affairs of Estonia.

Mr. Nestor (Estonia): It is a great honour for me to speak on behalf of the Estonian Government and to reaffirm our continuing commitment to social development. I also would like to associate Estonia with the speech made by the representative of Portugal on behalf of the European Union and associated countries.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General and the Division for Social Policy and Development for the excellent preparatory work done for this session, and I also wish to thank the Swiss Government for hosting this special session.

The United Nations conference held in Copenhagen in 1995 highlighted the worldwide importance of social development. The key objectives agreed upon in Copenhagen included the eradication of absolute poverty and the achievement of full employment.

At the time of the Copenhagen Conference, Estonia had already begun its transition to a market economy. Key structural changes taking place in the 1990s were the fall of the agricultural sector and heavy industries and a rapid growth of the service sector and new technology industries. As a result, the structure of the Estonian economy is now similar to that of developed countries.

The rapid development of information technology, which started with economic restructuring, has had a considerable impact on our labour market; it means that there is a high demand for qualified specialists and skilled workers. A reform of state vocational education institutions began in 1995 and aimed at providing young people and adults with an opportunity to obtain knowledge and skills that employers need.

Equipping schools with computers and teaching information technology is one of the priorities of education. Today, 60 per cent of Estonian pupils and students use the Internet every day. We expect the share of high-tech industries to increase remarkably in the Estonian economy.

The Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs has taken an active part in developing labour market policy and resolving employment problems, as long-term unemployment and unemployment of young people rank among some of the most serious social problems in Estonia. In 1999 the Employment and Training Chapter was prepared for the National Development Plan. One of its most important principles was to focus more on the implementation of active labour market measures and to increase the number of people involved. Special attention is being paid to the need to increase the role of social partners in solving employment problems and promoting cooperation between employment offices, training providers and employers.

As outlined in the National Development Plan, the objectives in the field of employment and training are the following: first, to increase the flexibility of the educational system and to strengthen its capacity to adapt to changes reshaping educational, social and economic sectors; secondly, to create conditions for employers and workers to acquire new skills and the knowledge necessary for coping with employment-specific, structural and technological changes; thirdly, to integrate persons in risk groups into the labour market and to ensure their access to education; and, lastly, to guarantee equal opportunities for men and women in employment.

Taking into account the European Union Employment Strategy, Estonia has prepared its first annual Employment Action Plan, which will be the basis for developing national labour market policies and for coordinating cooperation of various ministries to solve employment problems. Estonia will continue to develop labour market policies on the basis of economic and labour market analyses and forecasts, involving in this process all relevant institutions at the national and regional levels.

In preventing poverty, it is important not only to provide people with jobs, but also to ensure adequate wages. The basic principles of the Estonian national wage policy are provided in labour laws that also provide employees with minimum guarantees. The establishment of more favourable wage conditions is permitted in collective agreements and employment contracts and upon the employer's decision.

Since the beginning of 1991 the minimum wage level has been fixed with a tripartite agreement between the State, employers and trade unions. Tripartite agreements are signed every year, and the society has approved the procedure. Today, trade unions and employers' organizations are involved in solving different problems related to employment and to the labour market, both at the central and local levels. In order to involve the local initiative and make the local stakeholders responsible for solving local employment problems, tripartite employment councils have been formed in the counties.

Since 1995, unemployment benefits have been paid to those unemployed who are registered in a State employment office. As the unemployment benefit is small, the unemployed still face a considerable poverty risk. In 1999 the Government of Estonia approved the concept of unemployment insurance, and this system will be built up this year.

Estonia's population is rapidly ageing. Without reforming the existing pension system, growth in the

number of pensioners will lead either to a fall of the pensions-to-wages ratio or will force an increase in public funding. Such a situation may widen the gap between public expectations and the reality.

According to the pension reform concept, Estonia will establish a pension system consisting of three pillars. The first pillar is a State-managed compulsory pay-as-you-go pension scheme. The second pillar is a privately managed pension scheme, preserving the current pension-to-wage ratio and ensuring the growing purchasing power of pensions. The third pillar is a privately managed voluntary funded pension scheme.

Persons whose income, together with wages and social security benefits, remains below the Government-set level are receiving a subsistence benefit. This type of benefit is funded from the State budget and paid out by local governments.

In 1998-1999 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs and the University of Tartu carried out a joint project entitled the "Elaboration of a National Strategy for Poverty Alleviation in Estonia", highlighting the fact that poverty is one of the most serious social problems restricting social development.

Estonia was the first applicant country to the European Union to start the ratification of the European Code of Social Security. Our Government signed the Code in the fall of last year, and we will ratify the document next year. On 31 May of this year, the Estonian Parliament ratified the Revised European Social Charter.

The Estonian Government takes a serious attitude towards social development issues; our aim is a well-functioning, all-inclusive civil society.

The Acting President: I now invite His Excellency Mr. Soubanh Srithirath, Minister to the Office of the President of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, to take the floor.

Mr. Srithirath (Lao People's Democratic Republic): At the outset, my delegation wishes to extend our warmest congratulations to the President for presiding over this important special session of the General Assembly and to express our conviction that under his wise leadership this session will be crowned with success.

The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action represent a new international consensus on the need to address the core social issues. Since their adoption, major steps at national, regional and international levels have been taken towards the realization of the goals. So far, initial achievements have been recorded.

However, we are witnessing the negative impact and an unfavourable environment in the five-year process of its implementation. For example, the resources allocated for social development have declined; the external debt burden has grown; and with the liberalization of capital flows, the world has become more vulnerable to sudden financial shocks that have severe social and economic consequences. All this has caused serious impediments on the way to achieving social development.

My delegation fully shares the view expressed by many representatives that the world has become a more unequal place, both within and between nations, with increasing inequality in income, employment, access to social services and opportunities for participation in public and civil society institutions. Globalization has also posed major challenges for the developing countries, particularly the least developed ones.

In the light of the aforementioned, the international community, particularly the United Nations, has a crucial and coordinating role to play in order to solve this problem, to mobilize financial resources and to provide technical assistance to the developing countries, especially the least developed and landlocked developing countries.

The consensus reached at the World Summit on Social Development is indeed the implicit objective of the Lao Government's socio-economic development programmes, which are aimed at improving the well-being of people, providing social services and gradually reducing poverty. All efforts have been made towards their implementation. Since 1996, the Government's budget allocation to the social sector has increased from 11 per cent to 19 per cent.

Encouraging achievements have been made. From 1993 to 1998 the rate of poverty has fallen from 46 per cent to 39 per cent. In addition, there has been some significant progress in education and health; the primary school attendance rate increased to 76 per cent in 1999; the mortality rate for infants under one year has dropped from 125 per 1,000 births to 113 per 1,000

births, and mortality of children under the age of five has dropped from 182 per 1,000 to 142 per 1,000.

Public health care has expanded in recent years at both the village and district levels throughout the country. The immunization programme has been expanded to most villages. New programmes for maternal health and safe motherhood have been established. AIDS control and prevention have been given adequate attention.

Despite the significant achievements in education and health, we still continue to face other major difficulties closely linked to poverty alleviation, the transition to a market-driven economy, the consistent building-up of basic infrastructure and capacity-building.

People's living standards in the rural areas are one of our great concerns. For this reason, the Lao Government has set up the rural development and food production programmes, the objectives of which are to promote market-oriented production, diversify agriculture and provide access to the market and basic social services. For the first time, the paddy production output of 2.1 million tons in 1999 has rendered the country self-sufficient in foodstuffs. Furthermore, women and multi-ethnic minority groups are also our main target groups for fair treatment to enable them to become fully integrated into society and reap the benefits of economic opportunities.

As a result of high inflation and depreciation of our national currency stemming from the Asian financial crisis, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has experienced negative effects of macroeconomic instability, which has been a major handicap in our attempts to increase social expenditure and to address unemployment issues. Presently, the situation on all fronts is becoming stable.

In order to deepen the dialogue on our development policies and strategies, especially poverty eradication, the Lao Government has launched a round-table process 2000-2002 to persuade our development partners of our needs, development coherence and priorities. The dialogue also aims at optimizing resource mobilization and developing a shared and transparent framework of cooperation with our partners in reaching the goal of changing the country's status as one of the least developed countries.

In this context, I would like to take this opportunity to express our deeply felt gratitude to the international and donor community for their continued support for our development. Their valuable support has indeed been a significant complementary factor of national efforts to achieve progress.

In concluding, while the primary responsibility of realizing the Copenhagen commitments lies with national Governments, international cooperation and assistance, particularly in the area of finance, are essential to fully and successfully implementing these commitments. The Lao People's Democratic Republic, for its part, will continue to exert all efforts to contribute to the process of translating the lofty goals of the Copenhagen Summit into action.

The Acting President: I call on Her Excellency Mrs. Kadi Sesay, Minister of Planning and Economic Development of Sierra Leone.

Mrs. Sesay (Sierra Leone): My delegation wishes to express profound gratitude to the Government and people of Switzerland for their gracious and warm hospitality in their beautiful city.

Like many speakers before me, the Sierra Leone delegation agrees that there has been some progress towards achieving the commitments set out five years ago. But a lot remains to be done. As we observe advances in some areas, we particularly note setbacks and indeed deterioration in others. Growing national economic difficulties, exacerbated by global financial crisis and civil conflicts in many parts of the world, have inhibited the fulfilment of the Copenhagen commitments in many countries, Sierra Leone being one of them.

But I stand in this historic building, in such an august Assembly, with a sense of pride inspired by the indefatigable will of the people of Sierra Leone to stand firm against the forces of evil, anarchy and brutality that have for nine years fought to completely destroy the nation called Sierra Leone, its infrastructure and institutions. To quote our President, Mr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah,

> "we have resisted attempts by an inhuman alliance of local, regional and international vested interests to exploit our natural resources in exchange for weapons of mass destruction to wage war against the people of Sierra Leone".

We welcome the initiative taken by Great Britain to submit to the Security Council a draft resolution against the illegal and immoral trade in Sierra Leone diamonds by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels and their external accomplices — a trade that has for many years fuelled their barbaric and inhuman atrocities against the innocent and peaceful citizens of Sierra Leone. Our hope is that the Security Council will speedily expedite this draft resolution's adoption.

The cost in human life, suffering and destruction is unspeakable; the extensive nature and intensity of human rights violations, especially against innocent women and children are unparalleled. The present initiative by the United States, supported by Britain, to submit a draft resolution for the establishment of a special tribunal to try rebel leader Foday Sankoh and his cohorts for war crimes in Sierra Leone, so as to address the issue of impunity, is highly commendable.

The continuous insecurity has frustrated the efforts of the Sierra Leone Government to stabilize the economy and create a sustainable environment for social development. The safety and security of life and property of Sierra Leoneans therefore remains a high priority, as the armed forces of Sierra Leone strive to consolidate the Government's authority, until every inch of Sierra Leonean soil is completely liberated. So for Sierra Leone, the maintenance of law and order, the protection of the life and property of the citizens and the control of the integrity of Sierra Leone as a nation are prerequisites for the implementation of the great ideals of the Copenhagen Declaration.

For there can be no socio-economic development if a people is not free and safe. There can be no poverty alleviation if a nation is steeped in civil conflict. In fact, as poverty has been seen to be a cause of many conflicts in Africa, any sustainable solutions to these conflicts must begin and end with addressing the causes of poverty.

The contraction of economic activities and the fact that rebels continue to hold on to the mining and agriculturally productive areas of the country have contributed to undermining the Government's earning capacity, with an attendant decline in social expenditures. This in turn has reduced Sierra Leonean citizens' access to social services: education, health, shelter, water and sanitation. All of this is occurring in a country with an unprecedented number of amputees who can no longer fend for themselves and their families.

Sierra Leone therefore welcomes the current World Bank/International Monetary Fund initiatives for country-owned poverty reduction strategy papers leading to concessional lending through the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility and linked with the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative, launched in 1996 with the aim of helping relieve the debt burden of the poorest countries that are committed to fighting poverty and pursuing economic reform programmes.

Sierra Leone, however, wishes to warn that the processes for qualifying for debt relief are too complicated and too slow. The process must be fast-tracked and extended to all developing countries. For unless we tackle the debt burden through full debt cancellation, and use those resources for poverty reduction programmes, most of our countries will continue to wallow in poverty and stagnant economies. Accordingly, Sierra Leone is now in the process of producing its national poverty reduction strategy paper, which will go to the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility by the end of the year.

The widespread damage to the social fabric and economic infrastructure has particularly affected women, children and the aged. It is the Government's intention to provide community-based support services for the benefit of war victims, in particular to promote the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers and to help the highly traumatized, the amputees and sexually abused women and girls. The Government has now begun instituting a social security scheme as a social safety net that will provide support to the most vulnerable members of our community. Several microcredit schemes particularly focusing on women are being run by the Government and several non-governmental organizations. Various programmes aimed at improving access to preventive and basic health-care services and safe drinking water nationwide are being formulated or are already in progress.

Sierra Leone currently receives some resources from both Governments and other international donors for the implementation of various programmes. But in order to ensure that these resources, which are aimed at improving the condition of the poor, reach their target beneficiaries, the Government is currently putting in place an aid coordination mechanism for the effective

mobilization, utilization and management of aid flows in order to alleviate poverty.

The progress of any nation is symbolized by the status of its women, who not only constitute the majority of its citizens, but are the pillars of all societies. Gender equality and the empowerment of women therefore become an imperative. Sierra Leonean women have entered the annals of history for their bold and unflinching stand for democracy. They did this first in 1996 by demonstrating against and removing the military junta and, that same year, by bringing into being the democratically elected Government of Mr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. Then, on 6 May 2000, these fearless women again stood up against the RUF rebels who were refusing to disarm, in violation of the Lomé Peace Agreement. This culminated in the 8 May civil society protests that led to the eventual capture of the rebel leader and his cohorts. This is to the credit of Sierra Leone and of Sierra Leonean women in particular. However, even though women are such vocal members of civil society, they need to be given more opportunity to hold more top decision-making positions.

The immediate way forward for Africa is for concerted efforts by the world community to address the root causes of conflict in our continent and to provide timely interventions to put out the fires of conflict and stop them from becoming unmanageable. Moreover, the international community must encourage and provide the necessary support so that countries with emerging democracies can consolidate democracy, good governance and respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Unless this is done, all the ideals of Copenhagen + 5 and Beijing + 5 will be meaningless. For without security and peace there will be no socio-economic development.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Government and the people of Sierra Leone, I wish sincerely to thank all friendly countries — especially Great Britain, the United States of America, Germany and Canada — and the multilateral agencies, especially the European Union, the United Nations and its humanitarian agencies, for their invaluable support, which has helped to sustain Sierra Leone during nine years of brutal war.

But I believe special thanks must go to our brothers in the subregion as members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), especially the troop-contributing countries — Nigeria, Guinea, Ghana and Mali. And let us not forget the United Nations peacekeeping force troop-contributing countries, some of whose citizens lost their lives so that Sierra Leoneans might live in peace.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Nana Aicha Foumakoye, Minister of Social Development, Population, Advancement of Women and Child Protection of the Niger.

Mrs. Foumakoye (Niger) (*spoke in French*): I should like first of all to perform a pleasant duty: to convey to you, Mr. President, and to all of the members of the Bureau my most heartfelt congratulations. I should like also to extend the warm greetings of Mr. Tandja Mamadou, President of the Republic of the Niger, and of the Government, to all participants here.

My country participated in the Copenhagen World Summit on Social Development in March 1995. The commitments that emerged from this important forum, which were aimed, inter alia, at fighting poverty, promoting productive employment and increasing social integration fully reflect the concerns of the Niger, one of the poorest countries in the world.

In recent years, the socio-economic situation of my country has worsened significantly, resulting in an unprecedented deterioration in the standard of living of almost all segments of our society. These setbacks can be attributed, inter alia, to a harsh natural environment, inadequate economic policies, recurring droughts and the low level of development of social sectors. The situation is also the result of a growing informal sector in our economy and of the chronic political instability that prevailed in our country from 1990 to 1999.

It is clear that major challenges remain to be met with respect to the Niger's socio-economic situation. For that reason, Niger has, since the Copenhagen Summit, devised strategies and undertaken various activities aimed at implementing the recommendations emanating from the Summit. Those activities range from developing programmes and policies to the adoption of concrete measures for their effective implementation.

The Niger has put together a national framework programme to fight poverty and a national social development policy. Following the round table on poverty held here in March 1998 between the Niger

and its principal development partners, the programme to fight poverty — which aims in the short and medium term to reduce that scourge and in the long term to eradicate it — was launched upon finalization of the institutional setup, which consists of a national steering committee, a programme management unit and a technical follow-up committee. Indeed, a number of projects are being implemented in several areas of our country thanks to the assistance of our development partners.

The national social development policy, for its part, above and beyond the fight against poverty, aims to achieve two major goals: first, to strengthen social integration, and secondly, to promote social justice and equity. A major step forward was taken recently with respect to the second objective with the Niger's ratification in August 1999 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and with the adoption in May 2000 of legislation introducing a quota system benefiting women.

The social development policy incorporates the following sectoral policies: social promotion and protection, population, promotion of women and protection of children. A five-year plan of action is also currently being finalized following a consultative process.

In the area of job creation, the actions taken have been mainly of an institutional nature.

Concerning resource allocation, 30 per cent of public expenditure is devoted to the social sector, with 15 per cent going to essential social services, for which 12 per cent of official development assistance is earmarked.

I believe that the results achieved to date, although modest, are heartening. Overall, the poverty development index dropped from 66 in 1994 to 64 in 1997.

In the Niger we are fully aware of the fact that the modest progress that has been made can be maintained and consolidated only if consistent and vigorous action is taken to ensure good governance and the continued strengthening of managerial capacities in our national economy.

In this framework, following the legislative and presidential elections of November 1999, our Republic's institutions are striving to consolidate peace and democracy, which is the most effective way of combating poverty. Local elections will be held soon and will complete the democratization process, which has gotten under way in so promising a manner.

Let me also mention that peace has been re-established in the north and east of our country, and that we have established a national human rights commission and a national commission for social dialogue. Likewise, I should like to point out that civil society is fully involved in all development activities and decision-making processes.

Nonetheless, manifold and significant constraints still exist. In order to try to deal with these constraints and to try to live up the commitments that emanated from the Copenhagen Summit, the Niger joins its voice to those of previous speakers to put forward some proposals and suggestions for new initiatives.

At the national level, improved follow-up of the 20/20 Initiative is required with a view to mobilizing the resources required for financing social services; the poverty-reduction strategy should be integrated into the macro-economic framework to ensure sustainable human development; increased responsibility should be given at the grass-roots level through a decentralization process; there should be increased concertation between the various actors involved in social development in order to enhance coordination of activities and ensure a sounder use of resources; strong support should be given to the private sector by building the capacities of key players; and emphasis should be placed on the development of human resources, specifically of women.

At the international level, the international community must evince greater solidarity with developing countries in their fight against poverty. Debt should be cancelled or converted into social-sector assistance, and official development assistance should be greatly increased. In that connection, it is time that my country — whose level of public finance is extremely low and which has no prospect of immediate recovery — benefited from the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative. Economic data and more information about wages must be made available as soon as possible, because these areas pose a serious challenge to our public finance system.

Despite all the problems it is facing, the Government of the Republic of Niger reaffirms its determination to pursue the implementation of the

recommendations adopted at the World Summit for Social Development. It reaffirms its commitment to continue dialogue with all its development partners, with the needed transparency and greater rigour in decision-making and in the allocation of public resources. In that connection, the authorities of the Fifth Republic have decided to add dynamism and vigour to their guidance of how development is managed. To that end, the imminent formulation of a national social and economic development plan for the period 2000 to 2004, which will amalgamate all current programmes and policies, will provide a general frame of reference for future action.

Let me conclude by recalling the words of an eminent individual, who said that if economic matters overtake or turn their back on social issues, the social conditions of tomorrow, having been undermined, will paralyse economic progress.

The Acting President: I call next on Her Excellency Mrs. Jeanne Dambendzet, Minister of Civil Service, Administrative Reform and Advancement of Women of the Congo.

Mrs. Dambendzet (Congo) (*spoke in French*): At New York just a few weeks ago, from 5 to 9 June 2000, the General Assembly held a special session on women, to review the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action five years on. Now, since 26 June, here at Geneva, the Assembly has been meeting to review the implementation of the 10 commitments adopted by Member States at the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development. The goal of those 10 commitments was to combat poverty and to eradicate extreme poverty. What is the situation five years after Copenhagen?

In the light of the report of the Preparatory Committee for the present session — the high quality and relevance of whose deliberations we commend — we should acknowledge that, despite progress in certain countries, many of the important commitments that were adopted have not, unfortunately, been fulfilled. The Declaration and Programme of Action therefore remain timely. The international community must be mobilized; it must be truly determined to redefine its approach and find new means to respond to the expectations of the millions of individuals who believe in it. I would add that we need genuine political will with an underpinning of greater and more active solidarity with the poor.

Besides stating the facts and identifying the problems facing mankind, and besides the great challenges that must be confronted to bring about social development, the international community should join together to create a new awareness that can lead to a rejection of the shame that is poverty, the degrading, dehumanizing poverty in which the majority of the world's population stagnates — while at the same time colossal financial, material and technological wealth is spent to less human ends.

Five years ago, the Copenhagen Summit was a high point of dialogue and cooperation, which certainly attested to the determination of world decision-makers to work to bring about social development and to combat poverty taking into account the cultures and conditions prevailing in each State. Those were the stakes embodied in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, which gave rise to high hopes among countless individuals.

But do we feel today that we have accomplished our mission? Far too many outside factors have destroyed so many poor countries' efforts to implement the 10 commitments and to move towards sustainable social development. Indeed, the implementation of national plans that had offered hope in the health, education, employment and social-integration spheres continues to be thwarted by many obstacles. Those obstacles have been put in place by debt servicing, the continuing decline in official development assistance, protectionism in many forms, and the creation of false values that tempt young people in the absence of any true culture — in short, obstacles that constitute a vise from whose grip no attempt at a solution has succeeded in releasing us.

That is why, while we welcome such measures as the 1999 Cologne initiative on debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries, the Congo urges the international community to work towards the outright cancellation of such debt: the conditionalities that are part of the Cologne initiative make it deceptive and raise questions about it. Likewise, although it is now clear that, because of what is at stake, globalization is the principal challenge of the twenty-first century, hesitation persists because globalization involves threats to the sovereignty and the cultural and historical uniqueness of weaker States, and raises serious questions about the development prospects of the poorest among them.

More than ever before, there must be prior consideration of appropriate ways to ensure that globalization will meet our hopes for the development of peoples in unity and interdependence, so that it does not become a nightmare for the weakest, as happened with the insistence on democracy. Hence, to minimize its negative impact, we must define the moral principles and ethical issues that are raised by economic globalization. For example, can we ensure that women in rural areas have jobs and income-generating activities in the face of large-scale agri-business?

Other constraints on social development were also identified by the Preparatory Committee: civil wars, non-application of principles of democracy and good governance, non-respect for human rights, violence and discrimination of all kinds, social disunity, et cetera.

Here, let me touch on the situation in my own country. In 1995, at the time of the Copenhagen Summit, the Congo had been living in democracy since 1991, when the Congolese people opted for a return to political pluralism, to respect for the rule of law, and to good governance. It was because this was not internalized that civil wars, with their attendant disastrous human and material consequences, have tormented Congo since 1993. Those wars destroyed the economic and social fabric of our country.

To restore daily life in our country, particularly in Brazzaville, and to re-establish a minimum level of social infrastructures, the Government established a 100-day emergency reconstruction programme in November 1997. The priority activities of that programme, which cost about 10 billion CFA francs, included the following: re-establishing the safety and peace of the people; re-establishing electricity, water and telephone networks; re-establishing national radio and television; rebuilding local administrative facilities and public equipment; cleaning up the city of Brazzaville in order to prevent epidemics; re-opening schools and hospitals; and establishing an agreed framework of reference with our development partners. On behalf of my Government, I would like to thank everyone in the international community who gave us support.

In order to continue with these activities and to accelerate the reforms already launched to allow the country to combat poverty and to promote social development, the Government has established a strategic tool for economic and social policy. I am speaking of the interim post-conflict programme for 2000-2002. This program, which will cost 511 billion CFA francs, has been designed to start the real transition from the crisis management phase which our country has undergone to the phase of growth and sustainable development.

Moreover, the Government has been working, within the framework of its fight against poverty, to re-establish essential services in the areas of health and primary health care, basic education, sanitation and the rebuilding of our judiciary for the promotion and protection of human rights. The participation of the private sector in these activities has been backed by a pilot programme which directs external assistance towards non-governmental organizations and other community organizations.

Turning to employment policy, the establishment of the Congolese Job Fund, which is a privately managed institution specializing in job promotion, will promote training activities and financing for specific programmes, as well as self-employment projects and micro-enterprise initiatives. In addition, a young people's job fund has just been established by a specific law.

The objectives of the World Summit for Social Development and beyond — achieving social development for all in a globalizing world — can be realized in developing countries only if the following dynamic measures are taken first: remove the cumbersome, lengthy and constraining procedures of the European Union so as to release financing due to States, cancel the debt, increase development assistance and ensure a real technology transfer.

It is premature at present to try to assess the future effects of globalization on development. However, it is necessary to strengthen international cooperation and solidarity to allow access for all to the global village, through mastering new technology, the cost of which must take into account the financial situation of beneficiary countries. To act in any other way would only increase the inequality that is so strongly disparaged and would fuel doubts about the ability of the international community to promote the noble ideals contained in the Charter of our universal Organization.

Social development continues to be dependent on an environment where peace and security guarantee the expression of democracy and the protection and promotion of human rights. It is for all of these aims that the Government and the Congolese people, under the strong vision and leadership of President Nguesso, are devoting every effort.

I could not conclude my statement without congratulating the President, as well as the entire Bureau, for the way in which our debate has been guided. My congratulations also go to those who have organized these meetings. I would like to join previous speakers in thanking the authorities and people of Switzerland for our warm welcome here.

The Acting President: I now invite His Excellency Mr. Girma Birru, Minister for Economic Development and Cooperation of Ethiopia, to take the floor.

Mr. Birru (Ethiopia): Please permit me at the outset to express my delegation's appreciation to the President for the excellent manner in which he has conducted the work of this special session of the General Assembly on the World Social Summit and beyond, to which we attach paramount importance.

We are confident that this session will come up with concrete and comprehensive actions and initiatives to fully implement the commitments made at the Copenhagen World Social Summit. We believe that our collective commitment and shared responsibility can serve as our anchor for present and future international economic cooperation, and we place a particular premium on it as we confront the challenges of poverty, unemployment and social exclusion.

We are convinced that the agenda for social development provides a useful framework to undertake, in an integrated fashion, the international policies, programmes and plans of actions on social development which have been adopted at different forums by the international community.

External debt continues to be a serious obstacle to social development. In the case of Africa, the stock of external debt and its servicing has continued to drain our major foreign exchange earnings, while eroding Africa's creditworthiness. In light of already grim resource flows caused by declines in official development assistance, the crippling burden of international debt has seriously hampered social development prospects for most of our countries. The situation of the least developed countries is more precarious.

It is obvious, therefore, that, unless there is a swift and substantial effort to relieve the debt burden, we can never invest adequately to enhance our capacity for social development and our competitiveness in a liberalizing international trade. For social development efforts to bear fruit and economic reforms to succeed in our countries, all creditor nations and multilateral financial institutions should adopt concrete measures, including debt cancellation, by going beyond debt rescheduling and the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative.

It is the conviction of my delegation that each of our countries, including those in Africa, must take charge of its own comprehensive social development. The call on the international community to do the maximum possible for Africa in the economic area is an appeal to help remove the obstacles hindering the social development of the continent so that Africa can progress through the efforts of its own people.

The continued socio-economic decline in the least developed countries generally has been a source of grave concern. This is evidenced by the alarming increase in the number of people living in absolute poverty, economic decline, or stagnation. This dismal deteriorating situation is compounded further by lack of resource flows, dwindling direct foreign investment, reduction in export earnings, the excruciating debt crisis, rising unemployment — especially among the youth — and environmental degradation.

The persistence of these problems could easily undermine the stability of the world economy and pose serious threats to international peace and security. Immeasurable work has been done to redress the economic situation in which most of our countries find themselves. A lot more, however, needs to be done by the developed countries and the international financial institutions to extricate many of the world's poor countries from being completely submerged by the heavy burdens imposed by the present unfavourable international economic system. More specifically, new additional resources, at both multilateral and bilateral levels, need to be provided by our development partners if any improvement in the lives of the teeming millions in the developing countries is to be assured.

While referring to the social development crisis in developing countries, particularly in Africa, I cannot but make some brief remarks about the situation in my own country.

Human and social conditions in Ethiopia prior to the Social Summit were typically characterized by a marked deterioration in the living conditions of the people. The confluence of factors such as bad governance and ill-designed economic and social policies of the then Government, protracted civil war that lasted for nearly 30 years and drought were the causes that led to the unacceptably low level of human and social development. A major segment of the population was deprived of the bare minimum necessities of life. In the past, the social sector was neglected and perceived as being secondary, parasitic and dependent on other sectors rather than being the source of productivity and strategic input to the economic sector. Consequently, the sector was not the beneficiary of a fair share of the budget allocation and institutional innovation.

Stabilizing and reviving the economy and improving the living conditions of the people were, therefore, the priority objectives of my Government. Poverty reduction has consequently been the utmost preoccupation of the Government, even since long before the Copenhagen Summit for Social Development. The economic policy of Ethiopia adopted in 1991 unambiguously reflects that the overriding priority is poverty reduction, while promoting social justice and equity.

In terms of creating an enabling environment to implement the agreed commitments, the Government has put in place relevant development policies and strategies. Based on the macro frameworks, sectoral policies and strategies were designed, and implementation has been started in priority sectors. Policies in the areas of population, health, education, women, employment and HIV/AIDS have been formulated and adopted. The Constitution embodying the core values and beliefs of Ethiopians has been adopted, and the first and second multiparty elections were held in 1995 and 2000, respectively.

Our efforts have produced tangible results, although much remains to be done. The delivery and coverage of social services in health and education have shown remarkable improvement and expansion. Health service coverage has increased by about 10 per cent, while the enrolment rates has increased in primary and secondary education by 20 per cent and 3 per cent, respectively. The participation rate of girls has also increased at all levels of schooling. The share of social services increased from about 25 per cent to 28 per cent in recurrent expenditure and from about 20 per cent to 23 per cent in capital expenditure between 1995 and 1998. The real per capita expenditure on social services as a whole has increased over the past seven years. More importantly, our defence expenditure was dramatically reduced, from an average of 65 per cent of the total Government expenditure in the 1980s to less than 5 per cent in 1997, shortly before the Eritrean war of aggression.

One of the most successful innovative approaches adopted to fund the social sector in Ethiopia has been the formulation and implementation of sector-wide programmes. Ethiopia, with the support of its development partners, has formulated education and health sector development programmes with an investment capital of $1.5 billion and $0.63 billion, respectively, over five years. These programmes are the first real opportunities to implement the Government's social policies and strategies. The implementation of these programmes calls for an increase in resources and a radical shift in resource allocation within each sector. The Government is already committed to financing about 70 per cent of the programme costs from its own sources, and the commitment is being realized in practice despite the tight budgetary constraints.

While vast opportunities exist for development, Ethiopia is confronted with enormous challenges as well. Some 45.5 percent of its 60 million people still live in absolute poverty. The recurrence of drought has been a norm rather than a risk, and currently up to 10million people are threatened by famine. Environmental degradation accompanied by population pressure has weakened the resource base upon which sustainable development depends. There is a need to rehabilitate hundreds of thousands of displaced people due to Eritrea's recent war of aggression. The unsustainably high level of external debt is also a crushing burden on an economy like Ethiopia's, and high debt-servicing requirements prevent us from making adequate investment in education and health care and from responding effectively to emergencies. The continued decline in official development assistance, continued dependence on a single commodity for export earnings and the absence of

meaningful market access for the main export items of the country are factors undermining the overall development prospects of the country.

In conclusion, while looking forward to the full implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, we remain committed to continuing our endeavours on all fronts to fulfil the aspirations of our people for their social well-being, prosperity and security.

The Acting President: I call on His Excellency the Honourable Norwood Langley, Vice-Minister for Planning and Economic Affairs of Liberia.

Mr. Langley (Liberia): Liberia is grateful for this opportunity to participate in this gathering of stakeholders, this special session of the General Assembly entitled "World Summit for Social Development and beyond: achieving social development for all in a globalizing world".

I should hasten to note that the past five days of discourse by the presenters before me have adequately platformed the realities of a new and highly potent revolution; a revolution which will change the way we live, work, play, organize our societies and, ultimately, define ourselves. This revolution is globalization.

Achieving social development for all in a globalizing world, in my opinion, is indeed an appropriate theme for special session, and I salute the Swiss Government and the United Nations organizers.

I am honoured to be here and will speak to the concerns of post-conflict least developed countries. Half a decade has elapsed since we gathered in a similar fashion in Copenhagen to lay out a global social development agenda. Following deliberations at the Summit, the international community agreed on 10 commitments to serve as guideposts in identifying solutions to the problems of poverty, unemployment, social disintegration and so forth. Now, at this session of the General Assembly, we are undertaking an assessment of the progress achieved thus far and of the drawbacks and constraints which have stood as obstacles to full implementation of the Summit's goals.

During the preparatory process for this session, it was realized that most Governments, especially those of developing countries, are still unable to meet the basic needs of their citizens. Poverty, illiteracy and treatable diseases abound. In some countries hunger and famine have led to malnutrition and numerous deaths. Internal conflicts contribute to these appalling conditions for millions. Declining terms of trade, increasing external debts, a reduction in official development assistance and stringent structural adjustment programmes which do not consider social implications worsen the situation. In addition, the forces of globalization, while presenting many opportunities, carry considerable risks. Unfair trade practices, unequal technological know-how and low prices for the agricultural commodities on which most least developed countries depend are factors that impede the social progress of least developed countries.

My country, Liberia, has not been able to record significant success in meeting the social development agenda, principally because of the decade-long civil conflict that raged during the 1990s. All institutions that addressed social needs and dispensed social services were devastated. Three years after the war, the duly elected Government has the Herculean task of restoring the pre-war level of basic health services, schools and food distribution. There are the added problems of rehabilitating ex-combatants and reintegrating them into civil society with newly acquired skills to enable them to live productive lives. In order to address these problems, the Government of Liberia has endeavoured to establish an environment of durable peace conducive to revitalizing the national economy. However, the post-conflict situation requires an infusion of financial assistance to jump-start the process. Unfortunately, such assistance is in woefully short supply.

The Government has made numerous appeals for international assistance only to be lectured about human rights, which seem to exclude the most basic right of sustenance, the right to have adequate meals and good health. Nevertheless, the Government of Liberia continues to engage international donors and its partners in development to help revive the economy as a basis for setting and implementing a social development agenda that accords with the 10 commitments made at the Copenhagen Summit.

Our deliberations have considered all the dimensions and constraints that have prevented countries, both developed and developing, from meeting the socio-economic needs of our people. For developing countries to improve their capacity they require increased development assistance, equitable terms of trade, debt cancellation and reduction, and

structural adjustment programmes tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of individual countries. This will enable them to utilize their meagre budgetary resources for people-centred projects.

We have set the year 2015 as the target date to significantly reduce poverty and ameliorate the conditions that result from it. The success achieved by then will depend on how we view ourselves. Continuing to consider the peoples of the world in terms of "they" in the North and "we" in the South can only accentuate the great divide and the unwholesome thoughts that nurture the indifference to long-standing social injustices.

In closing, I wish to note that the human family has come a long way since the United Nations came into being. The new millennium offers the promise for us to give tangible expression to the preambular edict of the United Nations Charter, which mandates us

> "to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples".

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Estelabel Piad Herbruger, Vice-Minister of Youth, Women, Childhood and the Family of Panama.

Ms. Herbruger (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): As a representative of the Panamanian Government, which is led by President Mireya Moscoso, I would like to convey her greetings to the representatives gathered here and to the peoples they represent. Let me also take this opportunity to thank the fraternal people of Switzerland and their Government and to say how grateful we are for their generous hospitality and for the kind attention that my delegation has received since its arrival in this prosperous country.

Next November Panama will be hosting the twelfth Ibero-American Summit of heads of State and Government. Its slogan calls for uniting children and adolescents on the basis of justice and equity in the new millennium. That event will be of great importance for the future development of Iberian-American generations, because we will deal with highly significant matters of common interest to our countries.

We are a small country, with 2.8 million inhabitants, of which 60 per cent live in urban areas. Approximately 37.3 per cent of the Panamanian population lives in poverty. The poverty is concentrated in the rural and indigenous areas, where 77 per cent of the poor population lives.

The Government of Panama has made great efforts to reduce poverty, to promote employment and to achieve social integration. It is worth noting that Panama is among the countries in the Latin American region that have devoted the most resources to improving the living conditions of their populations, earmarking approximately 20 per cent of its gross domestic product to public spending in the social field.

Nevertheless, these great efforts have not achieved the desired results due to the inefficiency of social expenditures and the lack of adequate targeting of geographic areas and vulnerable groups. The Government's capacity to invest in social development is limited because the country's high level of indebtedness requires us to earmark 21.8 per cent of the national budget to servicing the public debt.

Among the priority activities for attacking poverty is the implementation of a rural development programme, which, in addition to broadening access to basic social services for rural populations, is reducing their production shortages. As regards the indigenous population, the State considers it essential to base its actions on the needs of that population itself, respecting its identity, values and culture, providing social organization and introducing modern methods of production. To make progress in this process, we have created a National Council for indigenous development, which is made up of representatives of the indigenous population and of the Government.

Among the main objectives of our Government is improving the quality and coverage of health care, which is closely related to the social development of the people. Although 80 per cent of the Panamanian population is estimated to have access to health services, and approximately 90 per cent to have access to drinking water, we are developing programmes to broaden these services in order to achieve a higher level of coverage for the rural and indigenous populations. These people are at a disadvantage by comparison with persons living in urban areas, where more than 95 per cent of the population has access to such services.

Education is one of the most important weapons for combating poverty. In this connection, in recent decades Panama has undertaken significant efforts to

broaden coverage. In recent years its efforts to improve the quality of education have placed it among the Latin American countries that devote a relatively high proportion of their resources to this sector. We have managed to achieve almost total coverage at the primary level; the actual figure is 94.7 per cent coverage. This has had a positive impact on reducing illiteracy, which in the last 30 years has fallen from 25.2 per cent to 7.8 per cent.

One of the greatest concerns of our Government is generating opportunities for productive employment. With 11.6 per cent of the economically active population currently unemployed, our goal is to enable Panamanian families to earn adequate and stable incomes. To address this situation, we have undertaken significant actions to foster private investment and promote growth. We have, among other things, availed ourselves of the enormous potential of the assets of the old Panama Canal Zone by incorporating them into the economy.

To promote social integration and equal opportunity, Panama has undertaken a number of normative measures, notably, our ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the reform of the electoral code that guarantees women the opportunity to hold elective offices; the law regarding opportunities and facilities for handicapped persons; the law that establishes equality of opportunity for women; the law that eliminates sexist language in school books and texts; the law providing a special regime of criminal responsibility for adolescents; and our recent ratification of International Labour Organization Conventions 182 and 138 regarding child labour.

In 1997 we created the Ministry of Youth, Women, Childhood and the Family, the main purposes of which are to foster human development through participation and the promotion of equality. Through the efforts of the Ministry, we have established the National Council for the family and young persons, the National Council for women, the National Council for youth and the National Council for older adults. These are positive steps for the organized participation of civil society.

For the first time in Panama's history, a woman is at the helm of the country. This is the result of the fight waged by the women of our Republic for the right to participate actively in the decision-making process and in the economic, social, cultural and political development of the country.

The Government of Panama recognizes the family as the basic unit of society and the fact that it plays a fundamental role in development, in addition to being an essential factor in bringing about social integration. In this respect, we have implemented policies and programmes to strengthen the capacity of the family to perform its social functions and to assist the development process. We are placing emphasis on the welfare of children and women, family values and education as important tools for achieving social development.

To sum up, the Republic of Panama faces the same development problems as other countries in the region. Nevertheless, it is classified by international organizations as an upper middle-income country, which limits its access to benefits from international donors. This is due to the fact that in the classification process account was taken of per capita income and national indicators, which mask the enormous disparities and inequities not only between regions but also between population groups.

The Government would like at this point to make several recommendations aimed at promoting social development worldwide. In this respect we suggest that participatory assessments be carried out on the social impact of structural adjustments in each country, and that this exercise include the United Nations agencies, Governments and civil society, so as to adapt economic reform strategies to economic realities. We must also appeal to the international community to redouble its efforts to give support to the most vulnerable countries in a spirit of international social justice and genuine human solidarity.

In conclusion, it is important to underscore the fact that Panama reaffirms its commitment to the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action and to the new measures to be adopted at this special session of the General Assembly. Panama reiterates its support for efforts to enhance existing policies on children, adolescents, the environment and equal opportunity, as well as for the goals that have been set to ensure a better quality of life for the peoples of Latin America and the world.

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gerbert Betancourt, Vice-Minister of Public Health and Social Welfare of El Salvador.

Mr. Betancourt (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to convey, on behalf of the Government of El Salvador, our sincere congratulations on the election of Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, as well as on that of the other members of the Bureau, to conduct the proceedings of this twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly, entitled "World Summit for Social Development and beyond: achieving social development for all in a globalizing world".

We are gathered here at this special session to review the progress made in the field of social development and to renew our commitments, motivated by the conviction that all countries present have been working in the spirit of the commitments we have entered into.

The realities of the past five years have been characterized by difficulties in the area of international finance and in trade relations between countries, as well as by problems resulting from the impact of natural disasters and international cooperation flows, all of which have limited progress towards the social goals set at Copenhagen.

However, El Salvador has continued to work to enhance its ability to provide for the social needs of the most vulnerable sectors of our population.

The implementation of the 1992 Peace Agreement made El Salvador one of the most successful examples of conflict resolution through understanding. This laid the foundation for a democratic, participatory, integrated and pluralistic coexistence, which created conditions conducive to progress in the implementation of the commitments undertaken in the field of social development.

In the framework of the Social Summit, the progress achieved by El Salvador can be summed up as follows.

In 1995 we began a process of educational reform that was defined and implemented through the broad participation of the citizenry. At present there are approximately 5,000 organizations in El Salvador, consisting of parents, students and teachers, who constitute school governing bodies.

Through the Educo programme, ranked number one in the world by the World Bank, we are addressing the needs of children in the poorest rural areas of the country. This programme makes it possible for the community itself to hire teachers and manage their children's education.

We have increased the school-enrolment ratio by 14 per cent and reduced the rate of illiteracy for people aged 15 to 60 to 17 per cent, the lowest rate in El Salvador's history.

Furthermore, in 1995 we launched the national school health programme, which encompasses educational services, medical care, nutrition, water and hygiene, improved means of access and the promotion of social participation. The programme is currently in force in 100 per cent of the rural schools in our country.

The programme has made it possible to reduce, throughout the entire system, the number of students who drop out, repeat grades or are over age. Its impact on health and nutrition has also been very evident. We are determined to find the ways and means of broadening the scope of this programme and increasing its benefits.

From 1995 to date, the budget of the Ministry of Health has doubled, and, with the help of contributions from international cooperation, we have strengthened our human resources. We have also broadened, rehabilitated and equipped a large network of facilities throughout the country, which has made it possible to increase coverage and provide higher-quality care and to reduce the incidence of disease, especially of contagious illnesses.

In 1999 we initiated a far-reaching structural reform of the entire system, with the participation of all actors concerned, governmental and non-governmental organizations, academics, individuals and trade unions.

As regards the fight against poverty, the overall poverty rate fell from 59.7 per cent in 1991 to 44.6 per cent in 1998. Over the same period, the absolute poverty rate also fell, from 28.2 per cent to 18.9 per cent. We have also reduced the rate of rural poverty by 8 percentage points, to approximately 58.6 per cent in the period under consideration.

With respect to other basic social services, water, for instance, is a very limited resource in El Salvador. Making it drinkable and supplying it to households is a priority which requires a major investment on the part of our country. The projects that are under way will soon make it possible for the first time to meet the needs of the urban population and neighbouring areas.

In the period from 1994 to 1999, the public and private sectors made a substantial effort to reduce the national housing shortage. An important part of that effort, aimed at assisting war-affected communities, was undertaken through non-governmental organizations.

These achievements, in conjunction with economic stability, support for the agricultural economy and significant investments in rural roads, have led to a considerable improvement in the quality of life of the population and to advances in poverty reduction.

Priority has been given to combating domestic violence through the adoption of relevant legislation. Furthermore, in 1998 we instituted a new penal code.

We have promoted gender equality by updating and implementing our national policy for women, which enables us to address that goal in a way that cuts across all government institutions. Joint efforts by the Government and private enterprise have aimed at consolidating such values in our society through communication strategies involving a variety of media. To fulfil its commitments with respect to social development, the Government has allocated additional resources to that sphere, and has enhanced the way in which they are used. Thus, 1998 saw the largest public investment in the social sphere in our history: 34 per cent of the national budget.

Social development is a global task for which cooperation among countries and among societies must be strengthened. We are convinced that this session will revitalize our commitment to social development and that we shall agree together to promote integrated strategies that will guarantee the well-being of our peoples.

As a preliminary step, the Government of El Salvador is promoting a new alliance among Salvadorans to ensure that all individuals, families and communities will be stakeholders in the pursuit of well-being and progress.

That is the challenge facing all the countries here assembled: we must together forge an international alliance for the sustainable social development of our peoples.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Kunzang Namgyel, Head of the Multilateral Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bhutan.

Mrs. Namgyel (Bhutan): It is an honour and a pleasure for me to address this special session of the General Assembly. On behalf of the Bhutanese delegation, I would like to congratulate Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab on his assumption of the presidency of the Assembly at this session. My delegation would like to commend the Commission for Social Development and the Preparatory Committee for their laudable work in preparing for the session. We would also like to thank the Government of Switzerland for its hospitality and for the excellent arrangements for this session.

We are gathered here five years after Copenhagen to reaffirm our commitment to the Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action, to review and assess progress in the implementation of the Programme, and to recommend new initiatives and actions for achieving social development. We have come with much hope and with the expectation that the outcome of the session will include realistic and concrete proposals to achieve the goals of our agreed commitments.

During the course of the debate over the past few days, many speakers have highlighted the obstacles faced by developing countries in overcoming the problems of poverty, unemployment and social disintegration, including the impact of globalization on social development, the social consequences of financial crises, the burden of foreign debt on impoverished nations and barriers to trade. They have called for concerted efforts by the international community to reaffirm our political will and to translate it into concrete action in terms of adequate resources and measures. My delegation fully concurs with those views.

Allow me to share the experience of my country in our efforts at social development. Bhutan is a land-locked least developed country with extremely mountainous terrain and remote and scattered settlements, and the costs of social development have indeed been very high for us. However, under the enlightened leadership of our king, Jigme Singye Wangchuk, we have in the course of the last four decades achieved remarkable progress. The guiding principles of our development philosophy has been people-centred, aiming towards what we in Bhutan call gross national happiness. This means that the people,

their needs, their well-being and their happiness are considered central to all development efforts. It means that economic growth is not an end in itself but only a means for achieving the goals of social and human development.

Participation by the people and decentralization are among the major goals of our development strategy. To that end, we have introduced significant changes to the system of public administration and local governance. Local development bodies have been strengthened to ensure people's participation and decision-making in all development activities, starting right at the village level.

I would also like to mention that we have spelt out our vision for peace, prosperity and happiness in the form of a document entitled "Bhutan 2020", and that we are very clear in terms of what we want to achieve and how to achieve it. During the past four decades, we have accorded the highest priority to the social sectors with about 30 per cent of our national budgets earmarked for them. Even the remotest corners of the country are being served with health, education and agricultural extension facilities. As a result, our goal of providing basic social services to the people has been largely achieved. There has been a visible improvement in the quality of life of the people. Infant and maternal mortality rates have been almost halved within the past few decades. Life expectancy has increased from 47 to 66 years. We have achieved overall child immunization coverage of 90 per cent, and 65 per cent of the Bhutanese rural population has access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Health coverage for our population is estimated to be around 90 per cent. Diseases such as leprosy and iodine-deficiency-related disorders are on the verge of eradication.

As for education, all Bhutanese citizens enjoy free education from the primary to the tertiary level. Another fast-growing initiative is non-formal education, with thousands of students, most of whom are women.

Despite our successes, we continue to face many challenges and constraints in our efforts at ensuring social development. An emerging problem is creating appropriate job opportunities to meet the rising aspirations of the younger generation. In the next five years alone, another 50,000 young people are expected to join the labour market. Another concern is the growing trend in rural-to-urban migration.

One fifth of the world's population lives in our region of South Asia. It is home to 43 per cent of the world's poorest people. While individual countries of the region have accorded high priority to social development, compounding factors of population explosion, environmental degradation and extreme poverty make achieving any meaningful development highly difficult. Consequently, there is a vast movement of destitute people in search of better livelihoods. For Bhutan, this means that as a result of the modicum of success in our development efforts as mentioned earlier, we continue to face the problem of illegal economic migrants, which poses a grave challenge to our peace, our security and our sovereignty.

Developing countries continue to look upon official development assistance as a very important source of financial support in our countries' efforts at socio-economic development. However, declining levels of official development assistance over the years do not augur well for the developing countries, particularly the least developed ones. While we thank those donors that have lived up to their commitment of allocating 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product to official development assistance, we urge the others to do the same.

I am pleased to report that the next round table meeting for Bhutan, when the Government of Bhutan and its donors will meet to review and discuss cooperation, will be held for the first time in Bhutan, in November this year. The outcome of that meeting will provide a vital input to the formulation of our ninth five-year plan. Our development partners have made significant contributions to enabling Bhutan to meet its development challenges and to the success we have achieved. On behalf of the Government and the people of Bhutan, I would like to take this opportunity to record our appreciation to all our development partners, both bilateral and multilateral, and to seek their continued cooperation and support.

In conclusion, each of our Governments, in a spirit of partnership, must ensure that we translate the noble commitments made at Copenhagen into concrete action. As for my country, we would like to assure the Assembly of our full commitment to doing so.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Navin Chandarpal, Special Envoy of the President of Guyana.

Mr. Chandarpal (Guyana): The 1995 World Summit for Social Development emphasized two simple truths. First, without social development and social justice there can be no peace and security within and among our nations. Secondly, in both economic and social terms, the most productive policies and investments are those that encourage people individually and nationally to maximize their capacities, resources and opportunities.

As we gather together for this special session of the General Assembly, let us remember that our heads of State and Government intended the Copenhagen Programme of Action to serve as a catalyst for positive change — a catalyst to eradicate poverty, unemployment, social exclusion and the great divide between the rich and the poor, both within and among nations; a catalyst to assume duties and responsibilities within this global village; duties to be carried out not only by Governments, but also by civil society, international organizations and other actors of influence at the national and international levels.

In fact, the presence at this special session of such a wide range of interested organizations, agencies and individuals further reminds us that the social contract concluded five years ago remains equally relevant today at the turn of the century and millennium.

Over the past five years, Member States of the United Nations have shared experiences and good practices in efforts to achieve the 10 commitments undertaken at Copenhagen. Earlier this month, another special session of the General Assembly reviewed progress and proposed further action in the important area of gender equality and equity. Similarly, within the United Nations and other forums, greater attention has been given to the development challenges of Africa and the least developed countries, the social costs of structural adjustment programmes, the dearth of resources available for social development and the root causes of underdevelopment in developing countries. The Cologne Debt Initiative, the trade negotiations for Lomé IV, the 20/20 initiative and arrangements for a special meeting on financing for development are just some of the steps taken in this regard.

The experiences of Guyana, as a small developing country seeking to provide a high quality of life for its citizens, have demonstrated the importance of political will, both nationally and internationally, for the achievement of social justice and development. The strengthening of democratic structures and institutions since 1992 has proved to be a good basis for participatory approaches to resolving poverty, unemployment, unequal access to basic social services and the marginalization of certain social groups within our society. Over the years, the budget for the social sector has steadily increased, with emphasis on health and education. Diversification of the economy, efforts to attract foreign direct investment and incentives for the private sector, including small enterprise development, have been actively pursued as part of income and employment generation strategies. Poverty alleviation programmes, housing, and safe water and sanitation policies, have been specially targeted on the poorest and most vulnerable in society.

Despite these efforts, important challenges remain. Poverty eradication remains a formidable task as policy makers seek to balance limited financial resources with the need to respond to the most basic needs of Guyanese citizens.

Building on the many initiatives taken so far, the Guyana Government has developed a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper which acknowledges that the fight to reduce poverty must be four-pronged. First, this strategy aims at stimulating economic growth through improving the business environment and providing sector-specific enhancements that will benefit the poor. Secondly, it focuses not only on improving economic and social infrastructure, but also on enhancing poor people's access to affordable health, education, water and housing facilities. Thirdly, pending the realization of the benefits of these two approaches, it will immediately provide a safety net to those who are more seriously disadvantaged. Finally, special poverty intervention programmes will be introduced to areas where prevailing poverty levels are still high.

Such an approach, however, calls into question the means at the disposal of a developing country such as Guyana to have a multi-pronged strategy to eradicate poverty. A case in point is that, despite improved educational standards in the country, as funds are channelled into the education sector, qualified graduates continue to migrate to countries with the

capacity to pay higher emoluments. This brain drain involves not only the young people, but also older professionals, including teachers and doctors, whose services in a globalizing economy have become increasingly competitive. At the same time, the demands of the labour market have had to adapt to the skills available in the country.

Another issue of critical importance to social integration, moral values and the fabric of society itself is the steady increase in violence, crime and the trafficking and abuse of illicit drugs. The drug trade not only corrupts individuals and systems by the enormity of its inducement but also threatens governance within our very country. Offenders, although largely youths, comprise all age groups, with even grandmothers being used in some cases as "mules" for the drug trade. This situation has not been helped by recent mass deportations of criminals to Guyana by the developed countries on the pretext that they were born in Guyana.

The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action have inspired nations to take initiatives to reduce poverty. It is true that some have worked more resolutely than others and that the levels of success have varied significantly. However, one lesson stands out in relation to the efforts of developing countries. Even those who have made great efforts at the national level are severely constrained by the realities of the international climate.

This forum needs to come to grips with the reality that good governance and inclusive policies are extremely important for a better sharing of the national cake in order to reduce the level of poverty. But it is equally important to note that for most countries of the world the national cake is much too small. The principles of good governance, inclusive policies, transparency, justice and equity must also apply in the international arrangements between States.

Globalization and the rule of the market place cannot provide the vehicle for improving the conditions of the developing world. Instead of globalization serving to promote greater cooperation among States, the process is being pushed to give increasing advantage to the already developed world. The wide gap between the developed and the developing countries is widening further. Developing countries are greatly disadvantaged by their inability to have access to improved technology. In spite of the commitments made by developed countries to place a high priority on technology transfer, they continue to treat technology as a commodity on the market.

A critical need for developing countries is to improve production, productivity and market access. We need to be embraced in a world of cooperation, not stabbed by the daggers of hostile competition which globalization is promoting.

Our experiences since 1995 have taught us that despite positive interventionist measures aimed at improving social conditions, our national success in achieving the goals of the Copenhagen Programme of Action is largely dependent on the availability of resources. Sustained and improved domestic economic growth and an enabling international environment must be seen as pillars of support for the social development of developing countries. Such an environment must ensure markets for our products and more favourable and fairer terms of trade. Similarly, debt cancellation initiatives must be considered effective tools to reduce the debt stock, thus releasing much-needed funds for the social sector and increased salaries.

We need massive debt reduction and meaningful development assistance. We need a more facilitating, development-oriented arrangement for international financial institutions. Aid must be a global dove, not a Trojan horse.

In 1995 the late President of Guyana, Mr. Cheddi Jagan, made a call for a new global human order to address many of the economic and social ills recognized in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. In presenting a number of proposals for issues such as poverty alleviation, debt relief, employment generation, population explosion and urbanization, he called for a strong partnership between Governments and agencies from both the North and the South. This call remains relevant and necessary today.

Every country can and must take internal actions to maintain social progress, and this forum must serve to reinspire and reinvigorate all countries to do so. But this forum will be a sad disappointment and we will have failed to meaningfully use the five years since Copenhagen if major forces do not take their heads out of the sand in order to recognize that the main impediments to achieving social progress are structural in nature, deeply rooted in the massive inequality and unjust relations between States.

This special session affords us the opportunity to accelerate the process of addressing the situation of the poor and the powerless. Less than a third of 1 per cent of global income — approximately $80 billion yearly — is all that is needed to address poverty. If the rich and poor countries do not act together to overcome want and hunger, there can be no lasting peace. This is not just a partnership, but a forging of our collective destiny in the interests of all peoples.

Five years after Copenhagen, let us be true to our consciences and leave Geneva with the resolve to deal with the causes and not merely the symptoms of poverty. Let us recommit to accelerate social progress worldwide through a more enabling national environment enhanced by fair, just and equitable relations among the members of our global family.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.